Evangelicals and Israel

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The Story of American Christian Zionism

STEPHEN SPECTOR

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Contents

Preface, vii
Abbreviations, xi

1. "We Are with the Jewish People," 1
2. Promise and Prophecy, Love and Remorse: The Bases of Evangelical Support for Israel, 23
3. The Evangelical Mosaic, 36
4. The Arab and Muslim Enemy, 50
5. The War with Islam as a Faith, 76
6. Criticisms of Christian Zionism, 111
7. "It's My Land and Keep Your Hands Off of It," 141
8. God's Timetable, 158
9. Prophecy, Policy, and the Unfolding of God's Plan, 186
10. Christian Zionists, Bush, and the Al-Aqsa Intifada, 212
11. Evangelicals and the Dynamics of George W. Bush's Middle East Policy, 234

Notes, 255
Selected Bibliography, 311
Index, 325

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Preface

This book is a study of the confluence of religion and politics in evangelical Christian attitudes toward Israel and the Jewish people. My goal is to explore Christian Zionists' convictions with empathy and respect, though not necessarily with agreement. I am Jewish and I do not share the fundamental beliefs that lie at the heart of evangelicalism. I have spent my career studying and teaching Christianity and the Bible, however, and I try here to represent evangelicals' views in a way that they will consider accurate and fair. At the same time, I offer perspectives that contradict and balance theirs. The issues I address are passionate. The Israeli-Palestinian dispute is one of the most hotly contested questions in the world, freighted with existential fears and elemental indignation and rage. Adding the conservative Christian marriage of faith and politics to that dangerous mix heightens the intensity of the debate.

That is all the more true because many Christian Zionists consider themselves to be naturally allied with Jews against a radical Islamist movement bent on worldwide domination. They cite the Palestinian graffito "First the Saturday people, then the Sunday people" to illustrate the global danger that extremist Muslims pose: jihadists, they assert, plan to conquer Israel and the Jews first, then the Christians. Especially after 9/11, some prominent evangelical leaders have made assertions about this putative conflict of civilizations that have seemed outrageous to many people. I attempt in Chapters 4 and 5 to discover the theology that underlies this point of view.

The alliance that many born-again Christians offer to Israel and the Jewish people is astonishing to many Jews. Bible-believing Christians are among the

last people whom Jews expect to love, defend, and even idealize them. Polls have shown just how much the Jewish community distrusts them. In 2004, when asked to give a "thermometer rating" of their feelings toward groups of people (from 0 degrees for very cold to 100 for extremely warm), American Jews gave evangelicals a frigid average rating of twenty-four degrees. More than one-third of them (37%) rated evangelicals at zero![1] That stands in startling contrast to the warmth that the overwhelming majority of American evangelicals feel toward Jews. Their thermometer rating of Jews in 2004 was a balmy 68 degrees. In 2005, 75 percent of them expressed favorable or very favorable attitudes about Jewish people.[2] John Green, a distinguished senior fellow at the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, notes that white evangelicals' positive feelings about Jews have only grown stronger over the last forty years.[3] But most American Jews haven't gotten that message. Instead, they see evangelicals as second only to Muslims in the extent of their anti-Semitism.[4] Much of that feeling owes to Jews' general tendency to oppose conservative Christians on many domestic issues, and to fear the loss of acceptance and opportunity that a more Christianized society might bring. But very many Jews also are aware of the unhappy fate that awaits them in classical Christian Zionist eschatology.

Many media reports and books have argued that there is good reason for Jews to distrust evangelicals. Millions of conservative Protestants, they say, have a hidden agenda. They may love Jews and support Israel now, but their true goal is the Jewish people's conversion to Christianity, and ultimately the destruction of all the others in the end-times. Moreover, according to many accounts, because these Christian Zionists see current issues through a biblical lens, they insist that Israel must refuse to give up one inch of the "covenant land" that God promised to Abraham and his descendants in the book of Genesis. The Jews must inhabit that land, in this view, in order for Christ to return. Former president Jimmy Carter succinctly expressed this dark portrait of those evangelicals: "There's a fairly substantial and very influential group of Christians" who seek "the complete eradication of any non-Jews from the West Bank and Gaza, the ultimate coming of Christ, the death or conversion of all Jews," said Carter. "That's what they espouse."[5]

In examining evangelical beliefs, I expected to find a theological rigidity, especially about the end-times, that issued in political obduracy of the kind that Carter described. Many commentators have argued, moreover, that these religious convictions helped define U.S. foreign policy under George W. Bush. I was prepared to discover that influence too. I found instead an unexpected pragmatism, flexibility, and nuance in evangelicals. That was true even of many of the most ardent Christian Zionists. I also found a lot of disagreement and uncertainty about the end of days. Even born-again leaders who are sure in their

convictions and invoke God's wrath for anyone who divides His Land, nevertheless showed a wholly unanticipated humility about knowing God's plan. Bush's top aides and Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon found that out when they asked evangelical leaders how conservative Christians would react if Israel gave up the Gaza Strip and portions of the West Bank in the hope of achieving peace. Evangelical leaders assured them that Israel has a right to make its own mistakes. If the democratically elected government in Jerusalem chose to commit national suicide, as some of them put it, they would not abandon Bush or Israel. That does not mean that Christian Zionists have no eschatological purpose in supporting the Jewish state, as some advocates claim, however. The issue is too complex and evangelicals are too varied in their beliefs for such broad generalizations.

One conclusion I reached again and again in this research was that for evangelicals, politics almost always comport with faith. But born-again Christians are radically individual. Any examination of their beliefs requires a nuanced understanding of the way that their faith prescribes and accords with policy. That applies to Bush as well, and to the influence that Christian Zionists, and his own convictions, had on his Middle East policy.

In researching this study, I interviewed evangelical leaders, pastors, and laity in Jerusalem and the United States. I spoke with officers of Jewish organizations and with Israeli and American government officials and diplomats. I attended evangelical worship services and Christian Zionist prayer events and conferences. I went to meetings between prominent Jews and evangelicals. I talked with specialists on Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, as well as survey experts. Several present and former White House advisers gave me their views as well, mostly off the record. I spoke, too, with people who have known George W. Bush since childhood, and with some who studied Bible with him. My research is based on what I learned from all of them and from Christian Zionist books, Web sites, mailings, and other publications. I draw as well on a range of scholarly studies and newspaper reports. I am grateful to all of those who gave me their time in interviews, and often in subsequent e-mail correspondence and phone calls. I especially thank John Green, David Frum, Richard Land, and the leaders of Eagles Wings for generously sharing their perspectives with me. I am indebted as well to those who read sections of my manuscript and made welcome suggestions: Yaakov Ariel, Ethan Felson, Amir Shaviv, Paul Nussbaum, and Howie Schneider.

I've been lucky enough to have as my editor Cynthia Read, whose judgment is invaluable. I am indebted to her, Keith Faivre, Meechal Hoffman, and the others at Oxford University Press who helped see this book through to publication.

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Abbreviations

AIPAC	American-Israel Public Affairs Committee
BFP	Bridges for Peace
CBN	The Christian Broadcasting Network
CFI	Christian Friends of Israel
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CUFI	Christians United for Israel
DPPJ	Day of Prayer for the Peace of Jerusalem
FSU	Former Soviet Union
ICEJ	International Christian Embassy Jerusalem
IDF	Israel Defense Forces
IFCJ	International Fellowship of Christians and Jews
ISNA	Islamic Society of North America
NAE	National Association of Evangelicals
NCLCI	National Christian Leadership Conference for Israel
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate
NSC	National Security Council
PA	Palestinian Authority
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
SBC	Southern Baptist Convention
UCI	Unity Coalition for Israel

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1

"We Are with the Jewish People"

Christian Zionism

"A growing group of us is prepared to lay our lives down for Israel and the Jewish people," Robert Stearns told me. That took me by surprise. Robert is an evangelical Christian pastor from upstate New York and an ardent Zionist. He had just explained the genesis of his deep personal commitment to Israel. While living in Jerusalem in the early 1990s, he had told me, he stopped at a favorite bookstore and fell into conversation with a young Orthodox Jewish man who was studying Torah and Talmud at a local yeshiva. The student had a zeal for God. As they spoke, Robert realized that this young man loved the same patriarchs and prophets that he did. Robert had been reborn in Jesus Christ and his faith was strong, but praying with this student at the Kotel (the Western or Wailing Wall), worshipping the same God, triggered a profound shift in Robert's spiritual understanding. It confirmed him on his lifelong journey. From that moment, Robert dedicated himself to discovering the Jewish roots of the Christian faith and to learning how he as a Christian was called to support and defend Israel and the Jewish people.

That was impressive, I thought, but it didn't explain Robert's willingness to die for Israel. Offering his life for the Jewish state was so strong a statement that it seemed to come from some other place, I told him (probably insensitively). Robert paused for a moment, then replied honestly: "Frankly, I'm very concerned about the world my son will grow up in." The danger is Islamic extremism. The world is changing, Robert told me. Europe is all but lost. Western values are at stake and Israel represents the front line.[1] In this brief

conversation, Robert conveyed much of the essence of evangelical support for Israel: empathy and pragmatism, deep devotion and a sense of imminent danger, all grounded in reverence for Scripture. These qualities, and the heartfelt impulse to cherish the other in oneself, crystallized the wedding of faith and politics that informs Christian Zionism.

The term "Christian Zionist" is relatively new. It did not come into widespread use until the 1990s, and there is no generally accepted definition for it. It is not in the *Oxford English Dictionary.* The phrase dates to at least 1903, when it began to appear in the *New York Times,* first in letters to the editor and obituaries, then, twenty years later, in news stories. In 1919, Nahum Sokolow used it in his *History of Zionism 1600–1918.* Writers sometimes cited the term in the decades that followed, occasionally dismissing it as a less-than-useful metaphor.[2] In 1967, Claude Duvernoy employed it respectfully in his *Le Prince et le Prophete,* offering a bibliography of "Christian Zionist" publications. In 1975, G. Douglas Young, a pro-Israel evangelical, observed in the *Jerusalem Post* that some of his co-religionists had accused him of being a "Christian Zionist." He thanked them for the compliment.[3] In 1980, the *Times* reported on a large Christian Zionist rally in Jerusalem, and by 2003 it used the term to refer to "a formidable voting bloc of conservative Republicans whose support for Israel is based on biblical interpretations."[4]

Definitions of the term tend to be too narrow or too broad. Church of Scotland minister Walter Riggans, in his 1988 book, *Israel and Zionism,* defined a Christian Zionist very inclusively, as any Christian who supports the Zionist aim of building the state of Israel, its army, government, and other institutions. He added that the term could apply even more generally, to any Christian who supports Israel for any reason.[5] Defined in that way, the phrase is so generic that it can denote, for example, liberal Protestants who sympathize with the Palestinians over the Israelis but who support the Jewish state's existence because of guilt over the Holocaust.[6] That definition is too broad for the purposes of the present study, which will analyze a more specifically faith-based Christian Zionism. Donald Wagner, a Presbyterian minister, professor of religion, and, incidentally, outspoken critic of Christian Zionism, defines it more narrowly, as "a movement within Protestant fundamentalism that understands the modern state of Israel as the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy and thus deserving of political, financial, and religious support."[7] That definition is incomplete. Many evangelicals and other Christians who back Israel are not fundamentalists. And although evangelical Zionists' beliefs usually are rooted in biblical prophecy, their convictions and motives, theological and otherwise, are typically far more complex than that, as we shall see.

I asked Richard Booker, a Christian Zionist and the author of over twenty books on Jewish-Christian relations, to define the term. He offered the broadest understanding, recalling Riggans': "It applies to every Christian who supports Israel, though they may not be familiar with the terminology," he said.[8] Booker, who is the founding director of the Institute for Hebraic-Christian Studies in Woodlands, Texas, exemplifies an especially dedicated variety of Christian Zionist. In the 1970s, he and his wife fell in love with the God of Israel, who put the love of the Jewish state in their life. He left a very successful business career and, with no savings or insurance, set out to educate Christians and Jews about the need to learn about each other and reach out to one another in love. After years of struggling, Booker now leads tour groups to Israel, raises money for Jewish causes, and helps Jews make aliyah (emigration, literally "ascension," to Israel). A different kind of Christian Zionist is Ted Haggard, who was the head of the National Association of Evangelicals until his very public fall from grace in 2006. Haggard supports Israel, but not because of biblical prophecy, which he doesn't believe applies to modern Israel, and not because God put love for the Jewish state in his heart. Rather, he backs Israel because it is the home to over five million Jews, and God promised to bless those who bless the Jews (Genesis 12:3).[9] The term "Christian Zionist" needs to comprehend Booker and Haggard, and many others as well. I'll use it here to denote Christians whose faith, often in concert with other convictions, emotions, and experiences, leads them to support the modern state of Israel as the Jewish homeland.[10] Robert Stearns is an excellent example.

Electric Guitars and Shofars

I first met Robert in February 2005, at a conference called "Rend the Heavens," at the Calvary Tabernacle in Cranford, New Jersey. The event was sponsored by Eagles' Wings, a nondenominational ministry that he founded after his life-changing experience in Jerusalem. Eagles' Wings had invited a delegation from the Israeli consulate in New York to attend the conference, and a young consul had asked me if I wanted to tag along. It was the first evangelical service that I, a Jewish man from Long Island, had ever attended and I was a little nervous. As I entered the tabernacle, I heard Christian rock music emanating from the sanctuary (which didn't reduce my anxiety at all). In the large lobby were tables with Christian books for sale, along with tapes and CDs—but also, astonishingly, shofars (rams' horns used in Jewish ceremonies)! Then, amazingly, pretty girls carrying large Israeli flags on six-foot-long poles marched from the lobby into the sanctuary. The sound of electric guitars and drums escaped as

the doors opened. I followed them in. Inside the massive room sat and stood 700 evangelical Christians who'd traveled from all around the Northeast to be there. It was a Sunday evening service and they were mostly in jeans, many with hands raised in the air, swaying to the music. In the front row were four men, conspicuous in their dark suits: the delegation from the Israeli consulate. I joined them with some relief. Now there were five men in dark suits, sitting stiffly before a crowd in casual dress who moved with the music and the spirit that filled the room.

Robert stood on the large stage at the front. In his mid-thirties, microphone in hand, smiling confidently, he looked a little like a rock star. "We're so honored tonight to have the new Israeli ambassador," he said, introducing the Israeli consul general, Arye Mekel, who sat two seats to my right. Mekel (who has the title of ambassador) had recently left the Israeli consulate in Atlanta to head the important one in Manhattan. "Let Ambassador Arye Mekel know we love him," Robert called to the congregation and the 700 people in the hall cheered. "We are with the Jewish people, against the spirit of anti-Semitism!" Robert declared and the crowd roared, "AMEN!" "Do you want to learn some Hebrew?" he asked them. The words "*Hinei ma tov uma naim, Shevet achim gam yachad*" were projected on a large screen onstage in English transliteration, and the Christians behind us sang them out joyously as the musicians played. The song, meaning "How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together," is a traditional one in Jewish services and has a sweet, lilting quality. Some people danced in place while others waved their arms to the rhythm. Girls walked down the aisles with white banners emblazoned with the biblical inscription, "ISRAEL, I WILL MAKE YOU A GREAT NATION." Then the music changed and the projector put onscreen the words to "*Sholem Aleichem,*" a high-spirited Hebrew song. Next it switched back to "*Hinei ma tov,*" as hundreds of people danced and clapped with warmth and happiness.

When the singing was over, Robert had everyone cheer us. Then we all sat and he addressed the congregation, and the five of us in front in particular. "We fully recognize that there has been a tragic and unspeakable past in the treatment of the Jewish people in Lutheran Germany," he said in a straightforward yet confessional tone. The crowd uttered their assent and Robert looked at us with compassion, maybe even love. "But we recognize that a new generation has arisen," he said. "And we have made a solemn pledge: 'NEVER AGAIN!'" Those are meaningful words to Jews, declaring that we've learned a cruel lesson of history, that we'll never again be silent as any of our people are slaughtered. But these were evangelical Christians rising to their feet. They were applauding enthusiastically as we looked back at them, trying to conceal our amazement. "That's right," they said in agreement. "NEVER AGAIN! Yes, yes."

"We stand with the Jewish people because you are the root of our faith," Robert declared, and I heard scattered amens behind us. "We know our God because David stood strong and Esther stood strong!" said Robert. I found out later that an Israeli deputy foreign minister had suggested to Robert and other evangelical leaders that, just as God had sent Esther in the Bible to deliver the Jews from annihilation, conservative Christians had been brought to a position of power in America for such a time as this. Now, at the mention of Esther's name, the people across the hall replied, "Yes! Yes!" "Israel stands as a democracy in a sea of Islamic dictatorships!" Robert told them. "Yes! That's right!" came the response. "He has kept his covenant with your people for a thousand generations!" Robert then said to the five of us. There is a rising anti-Semitism in Europe right now, he warned, but he assured us that American Christians will stand with us. Then came a surprise: "We applaud Ariel Sharon's courage, his convictions to make hard decisions in order to achieve peace," he said. That was unexpected. From everything I'd read, evangelical Christians were dead-set against Prime Minister Sharon's plan to disengage from the Gaza Strip and part of the West Bank. I made a mental note to explore this further.

Next, Robert called Ambassador Mekel up to the stage to speak. Mekel was accustomed to addressing evangelicals. He often had done so in Atlanta and the Southeast, so he was comfortable in this setting. "I bring you greetings from Jerusalem!" he roared. The congregation cheered in response. Mekel then told them of his birth to a twenty-one-year-old father and a seventeen-year-old mother, Holocaust survivors who were on a train leaving Russia. I was born on the floor of the train, he said. Luckily a woman passenger had a pair of scissors and she cut the umbilical cord. I know there are mothers here who wouldn't mind at all if nobody had ever cut the umbilical cord with their babies, Mekel said, smiling. Some people laughed appreciatively.

Robert then called another member of our delegation, Rabbi Gerald Meister, up to the stage. "Our rabbi of rabbis," Robert called him affectionately. "He danced a little jig coming in, so I suppose he's Rabbi McMeister," Robert joked. Gerald Meister is British, in his sixties. He has his own pulpit in Brooklyn but also is the Israeli Foreign Ministry's adviser on Israel-Christian affairs. The evangelical congregation here in New Jersey already knew him from his earlier appearances before them. In a sense, he really is their rabbi. "This guy is a trip," a man sitting behind me said good-humoredly, perhaps to no one in particular. It was instantly apparent that Meister is a mesmerizing speaker. Brilliantly, he seized on Mekel's story of his birth, using it extemporaneously as a metaphor to represent the close spiritual kinship between Christians and Jews. "God conceived us in the same divine womb," he declared to the born-again audience. "We have an umbilical connection. We are the root,

you are the branch. The root needs that branch and the branch needs the root." The image was from Paul's Epistle to the Romans, but there are some theological problems in this interpretation. Paul says that the Jews have been cut off from the tree until a remnant will recognize Christ and be grafted back on. I resolved to return to the rabbi's imagery later.

The congregation seemed awestruck. "They love you," I told Meister when he descended to his seat and rejoined us. "Theater of the absurd," he joked in the ironic, self-effacing manner of a British academic. But his dedication to this group, and theirs to him, was obvious. Our delegation exited through a side door as the music marked the resumption of the service. Arye Mekel had been a hit and Rabbi Meister's eloquence had been dazzling, but as we left I heard a couple of the organizers say that they'd run a little long. Although these big events are filled with love and joy, they have to be stage-managed carefully. Mekel and the others from the consulate got into a car and hurried back to New York and I left as well. But Rabbi Meister stayed behind. These were his people and he was going to visit with them.

A Plan to Redeem All Mankind through the Jews

The Rend the Heavens conference and my conversation with Robert illustrate some of the foundational elements of Christian Zionism. Many evangelical Christians not only support Israel but love it. Some are willing to die for it. They are adopting Jewish religious customs as their own, recognizing and prizing the Judaic roots of their faith. The high authority with which they endue Scripture impels them to honor God's love of the Jews as the apple of His eye. They affirm His promises to ingather the Jewish people to their ancient home in Zion and they rejoice in the fact that this is happening now. They believe that God, in His love for mankind, has a plan to redeem all peoples through the Jews. He revealed it millennia ago, in biblical promises and prophesies that are coming to pass only in our lifetime.

These evangelicals also openly confess their grief, and their guilt, over the persecution that Christians have inflicted on Jews over the span of centuries. They are horrified that it was Christians who perpetrated the destruction of the European Jews in the 1940s. As we shall see, many of them attribute the Holocaust to Satan, seeing it as a demonic attempt to frustrate God's providential design. And Christian Zionists are determined to defend and protect the Jewish people against their current enemies, the Arabs and Iranians, whom many of them also see as Satan's agents. This is not only a matter of religious conviction. Many evangelical leaders, like Robert, regard Israel as America's

crucial ally in a war against Islamic extremists. Israeli officials not only accept this support but solicit and encourage it, as was clear that night in the Calvary Tabernacle.

The Day of Prayer for the Peace of Jerusalem

Christian Zionism is only one aspect of Eagles' Wings' ministry. The organization also does outreach to born-again communities, some of them in underground or house churches in places like Honduras, Cuba, and China. But over the past few years especially, connection to Israel has become a major part of their mission.[11] Their huge annual project is to organize an international Day of Prayer for the Peace of Jerusalem (DPPJ), following the commandment in Psalm 122:6–7: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! May they prosper who love you! Peace be within your walls and security within your towers."[12]

I traveled to Wayne, New Jersey, on a Sunday in October 2005 to attend that event. On that day, Stearns's group had arranged for services to pray for Israel in over 100,000 churches around the word, with coordinators in eighty-nine nations, including several Muslim countries. Millions of born-again Christians prayed at once for the peace of Jerusalem. That enormous organizational achievement makes Robert Stearns a central figure in the international Christian Zionist movement.

The event I attended was in the sanctuary of Calvary Temple, an elegant space with about a thousand seats. Inside were perhaps 150 people of all ages, racially and ethnically diverse. For the first thirty minutes, a five-piece band and piano player, led by a pastor with a booming singing voice and a six-person choir, rocked and inspired the congregation. Their songs included "The Mighty One of Israel" and "I Belong to Jesus, Free from Sin." As I entered the hall, the audience was jumping up and down to the music, some with arms high in the air and backs arched. A lone woman danced down the aisle and nobody seemed to notice. The lyrics were projected high on opposite walls. An Israeli flag with the word *Yerushalaim* ("Jerusalem") written in Hebrew script was draped over the front of the sanctuary.

As the music softened, the mood in this elegant hall became somber, decorous. A woman placed her face in her hands and lowered herself to her seat, crying. Another glided slowly up behind her, caressing her back gently to comfort her. A young black woman stood silently in the row in front of me, her head lowered. Then the pastor, Thomas Keinath, invited people to welcome each other and the young woman beamed as she turned to welcome and bless me. Some people hugged each other. I noticed Rabbi Meister in a large prominent seat up

front and off to the right, facing the congregation. I'd chosen to come to Calvary Tabernacle because he was representing the Israeli consulate here and I wanted to hear him again. He hadn't been announced yet and he sat Buddha-like, looking serene and contemplative. Behind him hung a large, shimmering blue banner with a drawing of Jerusalem and the legend "Till He makes Jerusalem a praise in all the earth."[13] As the ushers discreetly took a collection, a mystical-sounding taped rendition of "Hatikvah," the Israeli national anthem, played in the background. Then a hauntingly lovely song played, beginning with "Dear Yeshua" (the Hebrew name from which "Jesus" was derived), and continuing with words taken from Isaiah:

> O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, a child wept for you.
> For Zion's sake I will not be silent,
> For Zion's sake, for Yerushalaim
> I will not rest, I will not rest.
> I'll set watchmen on the walls, O Jerusalem.

Pastor Thomas addressed us. "We are uniting with churches around the globe in accordance with the words of David, Psalm 122," he said and reminded us of the reward that awaits those who pray for the peace of Jerusalem. "We are gathered to pray to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, our God, the one true God," he said.

Rodlyn Park, an Eagles' Wings official whom I'd met at the Rend the Heavens conference, rose to speak. I had interviewed her after that earlier event and she had told me how the plans were coming along for the DPPJ. The coordinator from India had said that probably 25,000 churches in his country would participate. Christians in the nation of Jamaica had heard about it and said that they would have churches praying as well. Nine to twelve predominantly Muslim states, including the United Arab Emirates, would join in too, she said, and Singapore had come on board. Even Palestinians were represented. A year earlier, at the Feast of Tabernacles, an annual event that evangelicals celebrate in Jerusalem to mark the Jewish holiday of Succoth, a Palestinian Baptist pastor from Bethlehem named Naim Khoury had spoken very strongly in support of Israel, Rodlyn told me. Muslims had bombed his church dozens of times, he had been shot once, and his brother had been killed, she said. But Pastor Khoury is a Bible-believing evangelical and he responds to the scriptural injunctions to bless Israel and to pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

Rodlyn herself grew up in a nonbelieving Gentile home in Philadelphia. She went to a high school that was 99 percent Jewish, and when her parents moved away, she lived with a Jewish family for her junior and senior years. At thirty-two she became a Christian, which is to say she was spiritually reborn

through a personal experience with Jesus. When she came to her faith, she already had a deep appreciation of its Jewish roots, but she couldn't find a church that shared that view. Then she discovered the Eagles' Wings ministry and started to work for Robert, creating a manual that would teach Christians how to pray for Israel. People who have a heart for the Jewish people often need to be given a language to express it, she told me. She wanted to help provide that. Is Eagles' Wings interested in converting Jews? No, she said. That has given too much offense and pain to the Jews throughout history. Nor is her organization motivated by end-of-days theology. Her mission is to defend the Jews, "loving, speaking the truth even when it's dangerous," she said. "I do my job description and I'll let God do his."[14]

Now, at the day of prayer event, Rodlyn rose to update the congregation on the DPPJ worldwide. Over 100,000 fellowships around the globe had prayed for the peace of Jerusalem that morning, then many people had gathered again for additional special evening services like this one, she told them.[15] Robert Stearns and representatives from the Israeli Knesset (parliament) had come together in Germany to pledge solidarity with Israel as they prayed. Churches in every state in America, plus Guam and Puerto Rico, had participated. Eagles' Wings also had set up a worldwide telephone network and Christians had called in their prayers from Nigeria, Israel, Egypt, South Africa, Germany, the United Kingdom, Kenya, and Canada. People had prayed for Jerusalem in Hebrew, German, and Swahili, as well as English. One woman from Ohio had blown a shofar over the phone. They were fulfilling their biblical responsibility, Rodlyn said, to stand in the gap for Israel and the Jewish people. "Now maybe God can bless America," she declared. Rodlyn was referring to a biblical verse that was so familiar to her audience that she didn't even need to cite it: Genesis 12:3. In it, God promises Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you and curse him who curses you." This prayer vigil, then, like so much of Christian Zionism itself, was inspired by two biblical injunctions, both of which offer rewards to those who obey them: Psalm 122, which wishes for the prosperity of those who pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and Genesis 12:3, which offers blessing to those who bless Israel and the Jewish people. Some people in the congregation were driven by other motives as well, as we shall see.

Pastor Thomas delivered a brief sermon, which he closed against the sound of "Hatikva" playing softly in the background. "Breathe, O God," he said again and again in soothing tones. "Breathe, O God." Then he called Rabbi Meister up to speak.

"For 2,000 years we have never ceased to pray for Zion and for the peace of Jerusalem," the rabbi said magisterially. "In 1948, salvation history began to turn in the direction of the fulfillment of Scripture, the gathering in of the exiles

from the Western world, the Near East, the Far East, and Africa. And you, as faithful Christians who believed in God's word as truth, share with us not only the promise but also the reward: you are to be planted among the righteous."

The rabbi continued, extemporizing with the beauty and eloquence that I'd come to expect of him. "Words eternally true and free of error are written for you in the Scriptures that you carry in your hands and in your hearts," he told his Christian listeners. He was invoking the inerrancy of the Bible, one of the defining beliefs of American Protestant fundamentalism. The accuracy and truth of the Hebrew Bible is also a conviction of devout Jews. "Those are the only words that ever ring true," said Meister. He now went on to allude to another core conviction of Christian Zionists and many Jews: that the establishment of the state of Israel and the ingathering of the Jews represent the living fulfillment of biblical prophecy. "The gift of the covenant that God granted to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is now being redeemed in contemporary history," he said. "All of us are instruments of his words and of his will. To use Christian signs, we are all called to a special discipleship. An act of fidelity. An act of recognition that God reigns in Jerusalem. A covenant to which you, by your will and your faith, attach yourselves indeed."

The rabbi concluded by speaking of the Jewish people's gratitude for Christian support. "We are grateful for it," he told the congregation, "and we acknowledge it as a blessing for us all." This was an important reassurance in view of American Jews' widespread distrust of Christian Zionists' motives. Only weeks after this event, in fact, several prominent Jewish leaders renewed their attacks on the Christian right. "And so, as we approach this holy season," said the rabbi, "we impart a blessing that Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook imparted to his flock in the eternal and most holy city when he said, 'May the old be renewed and may the new be made holy.' " Meister had used his audience's spiritual vocabulary brilliantly, just as they used Hebrew words and Jewish concepts. He had woven Christian and Jewish theology into his language allusively, elegantly.

When Pastor Thomas spoke again, he was explicit and direct about his religious conviction. "We believe that we are living in the last days," he said. The harvest of souls will take place in these days, he noted. Then, as the piano played softly in the background, he invited people to come forward and "pray out." Rodlyn Park came up first. "Lord, your prophet Isaiah said that there would be a day when you would set watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem [Isaiah 62:6]. Father, this is that day. And we are those people who have said, 'Yes, Lord, here am I.' We will stand for Jerusalem. We will stand in the gap for the Jewish people. We will stand in the gap for Israel. We will be those watchmen on the walls, Lord, whether it's popular or not. It's not about what the world thinks. It's about what you do, what you've asked for, what you're looking for."

A young woman, virtually in tears, took the microphone to pray out next: "Lord, I thank you that you love your Jewish people and Israel. And Lord, I thank you that you have all of these promises for the apple of your eye"—a reference to the way that God thinks of Israel according to Zechariah 2:7–9. "We thank you that you will never leave them or forsake them, in Jesus' name," she concluded.

The reference to Jesus in God's commitment to the Jewish people was more jarring to my ears than it had been to my eyes in reading about Christian Zionism. Perhaps no one else in the room was struck by the formulation. Rabbi Meister is a scholar and teacher of Christianity and has spent enough time among evangelicals to understand the love behind such language. I was seated toward the back of the hall so as not to draw attention to my tape recorder and the fact that I was writing in a notebook, but a man came over to speak with me. "Are you the rabbi?" he asked hopefully. "No, I'm writing a book on evangelical support for Israel," I replied and he seemed pleased. He explained that they'd invited the rabbi from a nearby synagogue to attend and hoped that I might be he. He welcomed me warmly anyway. The local rabbi never came.

One young woman took the microphone and spoke of God's love for Jerusalem and Israel: "O Holy One of Israel, today we have felt your heart for your city and your land, for you are married to the land. We have heard the cries of Rachel weeping for her children," she said, citing an image that the prophet Jeremiah uses to symbolize grief over the exile of Israel, and Matthew 2:18 uses in describing the Slaughter of the Innocents.[16] "You have called them back from the north, south, east, and west," she said. "Give them hearts of flesh instead of hearts of stone," she pleaded, citing a prophecy by Ezekiel, sometimes interpreted as a wish that the Jews' hearts will be receptive when Christ returns, so that this time they won't reject him.[17] "Israel *will* be a praise in the earth, and they will eat the fruit," she went on, her voice becoming more fervent. "Father, you said it, and we believe it. Father, your son came as a babe the first time. But he's coming back as JUDAH'S LION!" she declared, her voice suddenly rising, and a shout went up from the congregation. Christ was born into humble circumstances and was the Prince of Peace in his first coming, she was saying, but he'll return as warrior to defeat Antichrist at the final battle in the end of time. "And Lord, we're so thankful for the Jewish people, that we're grafted in, that we're one, one new man in Messiah. Thank you, Lord!" Here, as Rabbi Meister had done, she was citing Paul's Epistle to the Romans, which says that the Gentiles are grafted onto the olive tree of the Chosen People. "The new man" was from Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, in which he says that Gentiles and Israel are no longer distinct. Christ has

abolished in his flesh Jewish law and ordinances, reconciling the Gentiles and Israel as one body, understood as the Church.[18] For Christians this is a beautiful concept of reconciliation and unity. Many Jews would have trouble appreciating the beauty in it, however.

A fourth woman came forward to pray that the Temple in Jerusalem would be rebuilt, that God's "biblical boundaries for Israel would be established, and that your shalom ['peace'] will be in the state of Israel." She was setting forth the preconditions for the Second Coming of Christ. Many Bible-believing Christians expect the messiah to return only when the Jews build the Third Temple and possess their entire biblical patrimony, including Judea and Samaria, the occupied territories of the West Bank. Many Israelis also want to keep those territories, which are precious to them for reasons of religion or security. But many others believe that holding onto all of the land will not secure the shalom for which this woman had prayed. Rather, it will engender continual strife with the Palestinians who live there. And building the Temple would almost certainly trigger a war, since it would be located on the Temple Mount, the site on which the Dome of the Rock sits.

Rodlyn Park rose again to ask God to send a fresh wind of revelation to the parts of the Church that are rising up against Israel, to mold and shape their hearts and impart the spirit of wisdom in them. This was a prayer to stop mainline Protestant denominations from pursuing plans to divest from companies that support Israel's occupation of the territories.

Pastor Thomas concluded the service. He confessed America's sin in turning its back on Jews who tried to flee Nazi German in 1939. "Lord, let us never do that again," he said. Then he repented the medieval Church's forced baptism of Jews "when it was totally against them, when this was a sacrilege to them. We know what we have done for almost 2,000 years. We need to call to be alongside the Jewish people. We need to lift up Jerusalem. Lord, we know that you are coming on the clouds. Lord, we know that you will enter the Golden Gate in Jerusalem." Here he made explicit why Jerusalem is so crucial to many evangelicals. It is the site to which Jesus will come when Christ returns, descending with the clouds in fulfillment of Daniel 7:13. "Lord, we know that you will raise up Jerusalem to be a jewel," said Pastor Thomas. "We know the significance to us, and to the Jews it has so much more. . . . You were with them in 1967. Lord, you go out before them in war." Here the congregation issued a cry of AMEN. "Lord," Thomas went on, "let them realize that the Church is with them, not behind them and not before them, but alongside of them. Lord, we just pray for peace, Lord, the shalom of Jerusalem."

Voices within Christian Zionism

These prayers and declarations represented a wide range of voices within Christian Zionism. Most Jews would find some of them entirely benign and supportive. Rodlyn Park's reference to being watchmen on the wall, standing in the gap to defend the Jewish people, certainly fits into that category. So does her rebuke of mainline churches' divestment programs. The young woman who prayed for God to transform Jews' hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, however, was more ambiguous. It could have simply been a prayer for Jews to love God. More likely, though, it was a veiled hope for them to accept Christ—as her reference to the one new man, both Jew and Christian, firmly suggests.[19] Pastor Thomas's remorse for America's refusal to save Jews in 1939, and the medieval Church's harsh treatment of them, illustrated the sincere repentance of evangelicals for past injuries. His declaration that we are in the last days, however, and his allusion to Christ's coming on the clouds, were straight out of end-times theology. The woman who called for building the third Temple and establishing Israel in biblical borders reinforced that. She was expressing a powerful theological strain in Christian Zionism, a view of divine history that was developed less than 200 years ago. It has the awkward name "premillennial dispensationalism."

Premillennial Dispensationalism

Premillennial dispensationalism was conceived and disseminated in the mid-nineteenth century by John Nelson Darby, a one-time Anglican priest in the Church of Ireland. Darby adopted a "futurist" version of premillennialism, teaching that the Jews would return to their ancient homeland, where every biblical prophecy not already fulfilled by the time of the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 would come true for a modern Jewish state. Remarkably, he developed this theological program more than half a century before Theodor Herzl called for such a state in his book *Der Judenstaat* (*The Jewish State,* 1896) and over a hundred years before the actual establishment of modern Israel.

Reading scriptural narratives and prophecies as literally true, Darby divided salvation history into epochs, or "dispensations." Most dispensationalists believe that there are seven such periods. According to Cyrus Ignatius Scofield, whose Reference Bible did much to popularize Darby's theory, the first five dispensations are the Age of Innocence, until the Fall of Man; the Age of Conscience, between the Fall and Noah's Flood; the Age of Human Government,

from Noah until the Tower of Babel; the Covenant or Abrahamic Age; and the Age of the Law, from Moses until the Pentecost. We are at the close of the sixth dispensation, the Church Age (also known as the Great Parenthesis). The final or Kingdom Age, during which the end-times will occur, is nearly upon us.

Darby's scheme is called "*pre*millennial" because it drew on Scripture to predict the disastrous and miraculous final events of history that will unfold *before* the Millennium (Christ's thousand-year reign on earth, from Revelation 20). Believing Christians will be physically carried off into the clouds to be safe with Christ in an event called the Rapture, said Darby. Apostates and unbelievers, including the Jews, will remain behind, and the Antichrist will rule for seven years, resulting in terrible tribulations on mankind. For the Jewish people, this period will be the "Time of Jacob's Trouble," spoken of in Jeremiah 30:7. The Antichrist will offer what appears to be peace to Israel and the Arabs will move the Dome of the Rock from the Temple Mount to a new Babylon. The Jews will then rebuild the Temple. But midway through the seven years, the Antichrist will demand to be worshipped as God, outlaw Jewish religious practices, and lead armies from the north, south, east, and west against Israel. Ultimately one-third of the Jewish people will convert to Christianity and spread the gospel. The rest will be killed. Christ and his raptured saints will break through the clouds and defeat the Antichrist in a battle at Armageddon, outside Jerusalem. He will cast Antichrist into a lake of fire, bind Satan, throw him into a bottomless pit, and judge the nations. Jesus will then rule over a Jewish kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital for 1,000 years, extending Jewish hegemony over the rest of the world. After that millennium has passed, Satan will be loosed and will launch another rebellion, which God will suppress. The last events will be the resurrection of the dead, Judgment Day, and the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

Paul Boyer observes in *When Time Shall Be No More,* his important history of prophecy belief in America, that Darby's theological system contained few elements that were entirely new. Rudimentary divisions of divine history go at least as far back as the twelfth-century prophecy scholar Joachim of Fiore. Increase Mather wrote in 1669 that the Jews would return to their own land and establish "the most glorious nation in the whole world."[20] Mather and many others also spoke of a Rapture doctrine, though not by that name, since the Bible does not use the term. The concept is based on Paul's prophecy of the "catching away" of the faithful into midair:

> For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are

> left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4: 16–17)

Darby was unique, however, in concluding that the Rapture would occur before the seven-year tribulation. The Jews' central end-times role and the idea they and Gentiles were on separate prophetic tracks were also distinctive and controversial aspects of dispensationalism.[21]

Darby popularized his theory through his writings and preaching tours, including seven trips to the United States between 1862 and 1878. The timing was propitious. Liberal theologians in America and Higher Criticism scholars in Europe were challenging the idea that the Bible is the literal word of God, causing great distress to Bible-believing Christians. Embattled American evangelicals welcomed Darby's emphasis on biblical literalism and prophecy. Darby's focus on the Jews' return to Palestine, their centrality in the unfolding of divine history, and their expected final acceptance of their messiah has had a profound impact on generations of devout Protestants, particularly in the United States. It spread through Bible conferences, Bible institutes, a network of publications, and especially the *Scofield Reference Bible* of 1909. Scofield wove Darby's dispensationalist doctrine into his commentary, which he printed on the same page as the biblical text. By World War I, dispensationalism had become nearly synonymous with fundamentalism and Pentecostalism. Today, perhaps 10 percent of white American evangelicals, about five million people, embrace Darby's ideas.[22]

At the center of the dispensational system is the idea that the Jews would establish their own state. Without that, there would be no Antichrist, no tribulation, no battle of Armageddon, and no Second Coming. "In short, everything was riding on the Jews," Timothy P. Weber observes in *The Road to Armageddon,* his foundational study of dispensationalism and Israel.[23]

The Restoration of the Jews

Darby dismissed theories that England was the new Israel. That idea dates to the sixth century and appears in Bede's eighth-century *Ecclesiastical History of the English People.*[24] Darby rejected, too, the expectation that the Millennium would be set in America, as Jonathan Edwards and others had proposed. The Puritans in New England were concerned to build a perfect Christian polity in America. They referred to their own experience in the New World in biblical language, as if they themselves were the new Israel. As a result, they were not focused on the literal Zion in Palestine. Increase Mather (1639–1723) looked

forward to the Jews' conversion and restoration to Palestine as a prelude to Christ's return, and even called for the destruction of the Ottoman Empire in order to help that happen. But his goal was to build the kingdom of God in America. In the 1730s, Jonathan Edwards, the leader of the Great Awakening, argued that human perfection would usher in the Millennium. Then Christ would reappear. As the scholar of religion Yaakov Ariel notes, this optimistic "postmillennial" view, that human efforts could bring the millennial kingdom into existence *before* Christ's Second Coming, supported the notion of a Christian America as a redeemer nation. By the 1840s, the first strong premillennial influence reached America. William Miller and his followers believed that Christ would appear in 1843 and the millennial kingdom would follow. When that did not happen, Miller moved the date back a year. Twenty years later, some of his disappointed followers organized into the Seventh-Day Adventists. Miller's eschatology had no role for the Jews, whose importance, he thought, had ended with the birth of Jesus.

In England, by contrast, end-times beliefs issued in a very strong interest in the conversion of the Jews and their restoration to the Holy Land. There were, in fact, Christian proto-Zionists in England 300 years before modern Jewish Zionism emerged.

The availability of sixteenth-century English translations of the Bible, and the Protestant belief that authority rests in the Scriptures, not in exegesis by the Church Fathers, inspired some Protestants to read the Bible in new ways. Putting aside the Church's traditional amillennialism, which understands Revelation 20 figuratively, they read these verses literally and concluded that the Jews would convert to Christianity and be restored to the Promised Land. They did not advance this "restorationist" argument without risk. One of the first to express this view was the clergyman Frances Kett, who called for returning the Jews to Palestine in 1585. The Anglican Church declared his writing heretical and Kett was burned at the stake.[25] One of the early seventeenth-century restorationists, Sir Henry Finch, a legal officer of King James I, also suffered for his convictions. In 1621, Finch published *The World's Great Restauration, or Calling of the Jews and with them of all Nations and Kingdoms of the Earth to the Faith of Christ,* which proposed that Abraham's progeny should reclaim their biblical homeland. The book was understood at the time as calling for all Christian princes to acknowledge the supreme authority of the Jewish nation. That put Finch in an unenviable position at court. He was arrested and tried, and was released only after disavowing any challenge to the king's sovereignty.

By the 1640s, the restorationist movement had taken hold in England. Palestine was no longer a land of purely Christian associations but the once and

future homeland of the Jews. Many Puritans no longer applied Old Testament narratives solely to themselves as the reembodied Israel. Rather, they now believed that the covenant remained in effect for the Hebrews' physical descendants. And the Jews' return to Zion was, for them, the necessary prelude to the coming of the Messiah.[26]

Curiously, these English beliefs may have influenced, and been influenced by, the Jewish false messiah Shabbatei Zvi. Zvi inspired hopes for national restoration when he declared himself the Messiah in Smyrna in 1665. Many Jewish communities, still shaken by massacres of Jews in eastern Europe in 1648, were overtaken by messianic fervor. Zvi's fame also spread among Christians in Holland, Italy, Germany, and England, where premillennialists paid close attention. Rumors about Zvi traveled as far as New England, where they impressed the clergyman John Davenport, an associate of Increase Mather who, like Mather, anticipated the restoration of the Jews. In 1666, however, the year in which some Christian writers expected the apocalypse, Zvi was arrested in Istanbul. Facing death, he chose to convert to Islam, devastating many of his followers.[27]

Sir Isaac Newton, who had a profound interest in Judaism, was, from the 1670s until his death in 1727, a premillennialist, a literal exegete of biblical prophecy, and an ardent advocate of the Jews' restoration to the Holy Land. Like most Christian Zionists today, Newton considered God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis to be permanent and irrevocable. Entering into a debate that still goes on, he rejected claims that the prophecies of the Jews' return from exile had already been fulfilled. Rather, he argued, the prophets foresaw two returns, one from Babylon, the other from the current diaspora. Newton based this "double return" of the Jews on Isaiah 11:11: "In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant which is left of his people." He believed that the Jews would convert to Christianity and return to the Holy Land prior to Armageddon, which, he calculated, would occur no earlier than the year 2060.[28]

English poets also addressed the restoration of the Jews long before the birth of modern Zionism. John Milton spoke in *Paradise Regained* (1671) of God's returning the repentant Jews' to their land in His own time:

> Yet he at length, time to himself best known,
> Rememb'ring Abraham, by some wondrous call
> May bring them back repentant and sincere,
> And at their passing cleave the Assyrian flood,
> While to their native land with joy they haste,

> As the Red Sea and Jordan once he cleft,
> When to the Promised Land their fathers passed;
> To his due time and providence I leave them. (III. 433–40)

Alexander Pope depicted the Jews adorning the courts of a restored Jerusalem, and barbarous Gentiles worshipping in the third Temple, in "The Messiah" (1712), his versification of prophecies from Isaiah in the form of a Virgilian eclogue.[29]

English clergy and government officials were proto-Zionists, too. Joseph Priestly, an eighteenth-century clergyman and polymath (he co-discovered oxygen), believed in the restoration of the Jews to "Canaan." In the 1830s, as Darby and his associates were developing and promoting their dispensational ideas about the restoration of the Jews, Anthony Ashley Cooper, the lay leader of the evangelicals in Britain, tried to translate faith into political action. Ashley, the seventh earl of Shaftesbury, believed that the return of "God's ancient people" to Jerusalem would hasten the Second Coming, and he urged the English foreign secretary, Lord Palmerston, to facilitate it. In fact, the Zionist slogan "A land without a people for a people without a land" traces back to Shaftesbury. Though not a literal reader of the Bible himself, Palmerston had practical reasons to enable the Jews' return to Zion under British protection: to use them as a wedge into the region, to help prop up the collapsing Ottoman Empire, and to frustrate French and Egyptian ambitions regarding Palestine. Palmerston appointed the first Western vice consul in Jerusalem to protect its Jewish inhabitants. Then in 1840 he tried unsuccessfully to persuade the sultan that the Jewish people would bring wealth to the Turks, "promote the progress of civilization," and check the evil designs of Mehemet Ali, the ruler of Egypt and pretender to the Caliphate.[30]

Another biblical literalist and restorationist was the German-English William Hechler, who believed that the Jews' return to Zion and the Second Coming of Christ were imminent. As a boy, Hechler wrote, he "entertained an almost superstitious reverence for Jews" and sought to protect them. After the Russian pogroms of the early 1880s, he and Shaftesbury formed a committee to resettle Jewish refugees in Palestine. In 1893 Hechler published *The Restoration of the Jews to Palestine according to Prophecy,* in which he predicted that the Jews would possess the Holy Land within five years. In 1895 he became the chaplain in the British embassy in Vienna, where he introduced himself to Theodore Herzl, the founder of the modern Zionist movement.[31]

Herzl was not the first Jew in nineteenth-century Europe to propose Jewish emigration to Palestine. Starting in 1839, rabbis Judah Alkalai and Zvi Hirsch Kalischer each called for Jews to colonize the Holy Land. Contrary to Orthodox

belief, the Jews did not need to wait for the Messiah to return to Zion, said Kalischer: they could do it themselves. Moses Hess, a German Jewish socialist who was inspired by Giuseppe Mazzini's attempts to unify Italy, called in 1862 for the Jews to fulfill their own national aspirations—in Palestine. Hess saw danger in the ethnic hostilities of Europe, especially German anti-Semitism. But it was in Russia that these fears were first realized, in 1881–82, in the pogroms and the "May Laws" that severely restricted Jewish rights. Some Russian Jews who had advocated secular enlightenment and cultural emancipation in a pluralistic society now looked to a different solution: departure for Palestine or the United States. Leo Pinsker, in his enormously influential book *Selbstemanzipation* (*"Auto-emancipation"*) in 1882, asserted that the Jews would not have the respect of other nations until they had their own land—though he didn't think that it had to be Palestine. In any case, hundreds of thousands of Jews preferred to remain in Russia, hoping for more tolerant times.[32]

Herzl, for his part, was acutely sensitive to the insecurity of the emancipated European Jews. The last straw for him came when Alfred Dreyfus, a captain on the General Staff of the French army, was arrested in 1894 and convicted of a trumped-up charge of high treason. That, for Herzl, was a symbolic moment. Dreyfus was a Jew who was deeply concerned to be 100 percent French, but he was shamed nonetheless. Anti-Semitism seemed to Herzl to be on the ascent everywhere in Europe except England. He determined that the Jews must seize control of their fate by making a thoughtfully planned exodus from Europe.

Eager to advance Herzl's program for Jewish emigration to the Holy Land, Hechler arranged for him to meet with the Grand Duke of Baden, uncle to German Emperor Wilhelm. That led to an audience with the Kaiser, who, for a time, was very warm to Herzl's plan.[33] When the first Zionist congress met in 1897 in Basel, Hechler and a number of other Christians attended in a gesture of support. Herzl and the Zionists didn't take the Christians' millennialist motives seriously but appreciated the political value of their support. The Christian Zionists, for their part, were enthusiastic allies but were disappointed that Zionism was a secular movement.[34]

Veneration of the Bible, the Jews, and the Holy Land was also a factor in 1917 in the British government's issuing the Balfour Declaration, which supported a national home for the Jews in Palestine. David Lloyd George, the British prime minister at the time, said in his *Memoirs* that he had had practical motives for advancing the declaration: he supposed that American Jewish financiers were sufficiently influential to bring the United States into World War I on the side of the Allies and that Russian Jews could keep their country in the war.[35] Historian Barbara Tuchman dismissed those motives, arguing

that British rulers' real reason for promising a Jewish homeland was that they intended to hold on to Palestine for its strategic value and they needed a high-minded justification. Tuchman also suspected that Lloyd George wrote the diary entry in order to conceal his private convictions, which, like Arthur James Balfour's, were biblical. Both he and Balfour certainly were influenced by their lifelong interest in the Holy Land and Judaism. Lloyd George wrote later of his natural admiration and sympathy for the Jews, and the fact that he was more familiar with the history of the Hebrews than of the English. Balfour referred to the Jews as "a great and suffering nation." His biographer said that he always spoke eagerly of his sympathy for Jewish philosophy and culture and of the immeasurable debt, shamefully repaid, that the Christian religion and civilization owe to Judaism.[36]

William E. Blackstone

Increasingly over the course of the nineteenth century, Americans advocated the Jews' return to their ancestral home. In 1819, for example, former president John Adams imagined a disciplined army of 100,000 Israelites conquering Palestine and establishing Judea as an independent nation. Methodists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians embraced restorationism, though the more established Episcopalians and Unitarians did not. The fullest expression of this subject before the Civil War was by George Bush, a professor of Hebrew at New York University and a direct ancestor of the two presidents who bear his name. This George Bush wrote in 1844 that the Jews should reestablish their state in Palestine, thereby elevating themselves to a rank of honor among the nations. Like most American restorationists, though, he sought to accomplish this through prayer and "carnal inducements," not through political action.[37]

With the rise of dispensationalism in the United States in the last decades of the nineteenth century, American evangelicals become as intensely interested in the Jewish restoration to the Promised Land as their counterparts in Britain were.[38] American premillennialists were mainly passive in their support for Israel prior to 1948, though, with the conspicuous exception of William E. Blackstone. In 1891, Blackstone sent a memorial, or petition, to President Benjamin Harrison urging the restoration of the Jews to Palestine. More than 400 prominent Americans had signed it. He sent a second petition in 1916 to Woodrow Wilson. Though not a premillennialist, Wilson had grown up in an evangelical atmosphere and was a member of the Presbyterian Church, which endorsed Blackstone's proposal. Wilson spoke in favor of a Jewish home in Palestine at least twice, but only privately. American Zionists Louis Brandeis

and Steven Wise said later that their success in winning Wilson's support owed to their appeal to his biblically based Christian faith. Brandeis and Wise welcomed Blackstone's contributions, and Brandeis actually called him the Father of Zionism, noting that his work antedated Herzl's. These leading American Zionists were not bothered by Blackstone's eschatology, with its catastrophic expectations for the Jews.[39] Several prominent American Jewish leaders and Israeli officials take precisely the same position today about evangelical end-times beliefs, as we shall see in Chapter 8.

Blackstone's efforts had no immediate results, but he added an important element to the American Christian Zionist narrative: that the United States has a mission to be the modern Cyrus, the Persian king who allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. God has chosen America for this role because of its moral superiority to the rest of the world, according to Blackstone, and He will judge it according to how the United States carries out its task.[40] Evangelical supporters of Israel today, including some with close relationships with the Bush White House, still say the same, as we shall see in Chapter 2.

Between the wars, evangelical Zionists continued to be passionately interested in Jews, the Zionist movement, and the Jewish community in Palestine. They were often critical of Arab hostility toward the Zionist project, which some writers condemned as an attempt to block God's plans for the end-times, as many still do. Christian Zionists did not shape British policy on the Middle East, though. They may have had some influence, modifying it or balancing other views, but conservative evangelicals in Britain had weakened dramatically as a political force.[41] After 1925, American born-again Christians, for their part, largely withdrew from political and social contests. The founding of Israel in 1948 and the Six-Day War in 1967 contributed mightily to their reemergence in the public arena, however, especially in the United States.

Replacement Theology

Darby rejected the long-standing belief that God is finished with the Jewish people, that all of His promises of good to Israel have been transferred to the Church. Christian Zionists refer to that belief as "Replacement Theology" and they consider it a profound theological error. They believe that God's plan for the Jewish people is eternally valid and that to say otherwise is to assert that the Lord reneges on His promises.[42] Clarence H. Wagner, Jr., former international CEO of Bridges for Peace, one of the largest Christian Zionist organizations based in Israel, offers a classic repudiation of such "supersessionism." He points out that in Romans 11:17–23, the Gentiles are wild branches grafted onto the

olive tree of Israel (the image to which Rabbi Meister referred at the Rend the Heavens conference). The tree, says Wagner, represents the covenants, promises, and hopes of Israel (Ephesians 2:12), rooted in the Messiah and fed by the sap of the Holy Spirit. Gentiles are told to remember that the olive tree holds them up, Wagner observes. He does not mention that, according to Romans, the Jews have been cut off from the tree because of their disbelief. Wagner does point out, though, that Gentiles should respect the natural branches, the Jews, who can be grafted back on again.

The New Testament references to Israel pertain to Israel, not to the Church, Wagner argues. They are literal, not figurative. The scriptural promises include the Gentiles, but they do not exclude the Jews. In Romans 11, a key chapter in this context, Paul says that the Jews are beloved for the sake of the Patriarchs, and that God's gifts and calling of Israel are irrevocable. Psalm 105:8–11 and Jeremiah 31:35–37 also speak of God's promises as everlasting. For the Christian Church to arrogate these promises to itself, as it has done since the second century A.D., is arrogant and self-centered, Wagner declares. The result, he says, has been centuries of anti-Semitism.[43]

When I asked Christian Zionist leaders in Israel and across the United States how George W. Bush, a Bible-believing, born-again Christian, could urge Israel to give up land that God promised to Abraham in Genesis, most of them offered a single explanation: he believes in Replacement Theology. That is a matter of debate, however.